

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg

VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

UNEMPLOYED VETERANS REQUESTING

RETRAINING PROGRAM TO ENHANCE JOB SKILLS

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has approved more than 36,000 applications for the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), a new training and education program for unemployed veterans to upgrade their skills for in-demand jobs. The program, a provision of the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, which was passed by Congress and signed by the President in November 2011, is managed by VA and the Department of Labor (DOL) and allows qualifying veterans to receive up to 12 months of education assistance equal to the full-time Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty rate, currently \$1,473 per month.

The goal of VRAP is to train a total of 99,000 veterans over the next two years in more than 200 job skills that DOL has determined are the most sought-after by employers.

Applicants approved for the 2013 phase should enroll full-time in an approved program and start training by April 2013 in order to take full advantage of this benefit before its termination March 31, 2014. The program of study must lead to an associate degree, non-college degree, or certificate for a high-demand occupation as defined by DOL.

Potential applicants can learn more about VRAP and apply online at www.benefits.va.gov/VOW, or call VA toll-free at 1-800-827-1000. Information about the Department of Labor's programs for veterans is available at www.dol.gov/vets. Veterans can also visit the nearly 3,000 One-Stop Career Centers across the nation, listed at www.servicelocator.org, for in-person assistance.

"BLUE BUTTON" REACHES ONE MILLION

REGISTERED PATIENTS (VA News Release)

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that during the month of August, the one millionth patient has registered for Blue Button to access and download their Personal Health Record (PHR) information.

The Blue Button enables patients to assemble and download personal health information into a single, portable file that can be used inside a growing number of private health care electronic records—as well as those in the VA, Department of Defense, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and private sector partners. The VA Blue Button PHR includes prescription history, the ability to review past appointments and medical history details, wellness reminders and emergency contact information. Because it is web-based, the information is available anywhere, any time. Its security measures are identical to those employed by retail websites that accept credit cards.

The Blue Button will see even wider use as more non-profit organizations and health care industry partners, such as Kaiser Permanente and Aetna adopt it as an integral part of their customer health records. One of the most recent Blue Button partners is UnitedHealth Group.

For more information on the Blue Button initiative, please visit: <http://www.va.gov/bluebutton/>

VA SUPPORTS GULF WAR VETERANS ON MULTIPLE FRONTS

(VA News Release) It has now been 22 years since the start of the 1990-1991 Gulf War which comprises the deployment and combat operations known as Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Those veterans who have enrolled in the VA health care system have made over 2 million outpatient visits for health care and had over 20,000 inpatient admissions in the VA health care system.

In support of care and services to the veterans of the first Gulf War, VA has led efforts to better understand and characterize Gulf War veterans' illnesses and to improve treatment. Research initiatives have included:

Funding an independent Institute of Medicine (IOM) review of scientific and medical research related to treatment of chronic multi-symptom illness among Gulf War veterans. The report is expected in 2013.

Funding and encouraging a wide spectrum of research focused on identifying new treatments to help Gulf War

veterans, including studies on pain, muscle and bone disorders, autoimmune disease, neurodegenerative disease, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory problems, and other chronic diseases. Research is ongoing in other conditions, as well, that may affect Gulf War veterans, such as brain cancer, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS), and multiple sclerosis.

Launching in May 2012, the third follow-up study of a national cohort of Gulf War and Gulf War Era veterans (earlier studies were conducted in 1995 and 2005; the health surveys are done to understand possible health effects of service and guide health care delivery).

Continuing the clinical, research, and education activities of the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center program which focuses on post-deployment health.

VA is also improving care and services for Gulf War veterans through initiatives outlined in the 2011 GWVI Task Force Report. These include the evaluation of a clinical care model specifically for Gulf War veterans and of enhanced education for health care providers about Gulf War veterans' concerns. Additionally, a VA Gulf War Research Strategic Plan has been developed to address effective treatment for the symptoms experienced by some Gulf War veterans and to guide efforts toward improvements in diagnosis, the understanding of genetic and biologic factors related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses, and the application of research findings in veterans' health care.

For more information on Gulf War Veterans' illnesses, see: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/>.

POST-9/11 GI BILL CELEBRATES START OF FOURTH YEAR (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – August marks the third anniversary of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and since it was implemented Aug. 1, 2009, the Department of Veterans Affairs has provided educational benefits to 773,000 veterans and their family members. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is the most extensive educational assistance program since the original GI Bill was signed into law in 1944. Since its inception, VA has paid more than \$20 billion in benefits to veterans and their family members.

VA is seeking legal authority to trademark the term *GI Bill*. President Obama signed an executive order on April 26, directing VA and the Department of Defense to undertake a number of measures to "stop deceptive and misleading" promotional efforts that target the GI Bill educational benefits of service members, veterans, and eligible family members and survivors. In June, the attorneys general of several states gave VA the rights to the *GI Bill.com* website after the original owners agreed to give up the internet site to settle a lawsuit by the states.

For more information on the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other veteran education programs, visit <http://www.gibill.va.gov>.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740

6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489

4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846

9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) - 711

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

VA Workload and Performance Reports; <http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes): <http://va.equator.com>

Federal employment: www.usajobs.opm.gov

Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs: www.FloridaVets.org

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov